Monetization of Anger, Propaganda 2.0 Model

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(Ideas from the book The Economic Policy of Online Media: Manufacture of Dissent, Routledge, 2024)

Abstract

This article examines the transformation of propaganda mechanisms from the classical model proposed by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in "Manufacturing Consent" (1988) to a new paradigm—Propaganda 2.0—developed in the works of Jan-Hendrik Fuchs and Peter Ayolov. The shift from the manufacturing of a unified political consensus to the systematic manufacturing of dissent reflects fundamental changes in media economics, platform governance, and emotional manipulation within digital environments. Central to the updated model is the principle that "angry people click more", revealing how online media monetise emotional intensity—particularly anger—through algorithmic amplification, micro-targeting, and engagement-based revenue structures. This article compares the structural filters of the original propaganda model with their digital adaptations and highlights the economic incentives that drive online media toward polarisation, outrage, and sustained ideological conflict. It further examines the phenomenon of rage-baiting and anger-clicking as operational expressions of Propaganda 2.0 and argues for the urgent development of a theoretical and regulatory framework capable of addressing the systemic monetisation of negative affect in contemporary communication ecosystems.

Keywords:

Propaganda 2.0; Manufacture of dissent; Digital media; Anger monetisation; Rage-baiting; Online platforms; Attention economy; Algorithms; Chomsky; Herman; Ayolov.

Introduction: From Manufacturing Consent to the Manufacture of Dissent

The conceptual shift between Herman and Chomsky’s "Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media" and Peter Ayolov’s "The Economic Policy of Online Media: Manufacture of Dissent" represents a profound change in the logic of media power. For Herman and Chomsky, the functioning of mass media in the late twentieth century was defined by the creation of a broad ideological consensus that aligned public opinion with elite political and economic interests. By contrast, Ayolov’s thesis argues that the digital media environment produces the opposite effect: instead of consensus, it systematically generates dissent, conflict, and polarisation because these yield higher economic returns

within the attention economy. Political ideas become commodified linguistic tokens; moral values function as engagement triggers; and dissent—not unity—becomes the profitable end-point of contemporary communication systems.

Chomsky and Herman's Propaganda Model: Consensus as Political Technology

The propaganda model proposed five structural filters—ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and dominant ideology (originally anti-communism)—that shape and limit public discourse. These filters facilitated the formation of a stable mainstream narrative, marginalised opposition, and channelled public perception toward elite-approved positions. The model presupposed a relatively unified media environment dominated by a small number of major institutions. Consensus, rather than disagreement, was the economically rational outcome of this structure.

Propaganda 2.0: Dissent as an Economic Resource

In Ayolov's reformulation, the economic model of online media fundamentally alters the relationship between media structures and political outcomes. The mass audience has fragmented into algorithmically sorted micro-publics, and engagement has replaced information as the primary commodity. Anger and division generate more engagement than reasoned analysis or pluralistic deliberation; thus platforms profit by fostering dissent. The shift can be summarised across several dimensions:

• From ownership to platform power: control shifts from media corporations to technology platforms (Google, Meta, X), whose algorithms function as the new gatekeepers of information.

• From advertising to data-driven attention extraction: targeted advertising and behavioural micro-profiling reward content that produces emotional reactions.

• From elite sourcing to algorithmic curation: information flows are determined by personalised recommendation systems rather than journalistic hierarchies.

• From traditional flak to digital silencing: deplatforming, shadow banning, and automated moderation constitute new disciplinary mechanisms.

• From anti-communism to culture-war polarisation: ideological cohesion is replaced by perpetual conflict over identity, morality, and symbolic threats.

Instead of integrating the public into a shared worldview, Propaganda 2.0 thrives on fragmenting audiences into competing ideological factions—a

condition Ayolov describes as a technologically mediated "civil cold war online".

Propaganda 2.0 in Comparative Perspective: Fuchs, Rose-Stockwell, Ayolov

Christian Fuchs extends the classical propaganda model into the digital sphere, arguing that platform capitalism reinforces structural inequalities and enhances elite capacities for surveillance and opinion-shaping. Tobias Rose-Stockwell's "The Outrage Machine" focuses on the emotional dimension of engagement-maximising algorithms, showing how outrage becomes operationalised as a revenue-driver. Ayolov synthesises these developments into an overarching economic theory: online media systems are designed to manufacture dissent, not simply amplify elite messaging. Where Fuchs analyses structural power and Rose-Stockwell examines technological design, Ayolov foregrounds the economic logic converting anger into profit through strategic polarisation.

Rage-Baiting, Anger-Clicking, and the Monetisation of Emotion

The rise of rage-baiting—a practice recognised in 2025 as a defining feature of online discourse—illustrates the operational mechanics of Propaganda 2.0. Rage-baiting is the deliberate production of content intended to provoke anger, stimulate rapid interaction, and increase platform retention. This behaviour is a direct consequence of the principle Ayolov formulates: "angry people click more". Algorithms reward posts that trigger outrage because they generate measurable engagement. As whistle-blower Frances Haugen revealed, platforms knowingly amplify divisive content because it contributes to longer user sessions and increased advertising revenue. The weaponisation of emotional arousal thus becomes intrinsic to the economic architecture of digital communication systems.

Conclusion: Towards a New Paradigm of Critical Media Theory

The transformation from Manufacturing Consent to the Manufacture of Dissent signifies more than an evolution in media technology; it marks a structural reorientation of propaganda itself. Where traditional propaganda sought unity, digital propaganda seeks profitable fragmentation. Anger, not persuasion, becomes the central currency of communication. Understanding this shift demands a new theoretical paradigm—Propaganda 2.0—that accounts for algorithmic governance, data extraction, platform capitalism, and the emotional engineering of public life. Addressing the systemic monetisation of negative affect requires interventions that extend beyond fact-checking or content moderation. It requires rethinking the political economy of digital media, developing regulatory frameworks that challenge engagement-maximisation incentives, and cultivating media literacy capable of resisting emotional manipulation. Only by confronting the economic

structures that reward outrage can societies hope to reclaim digital communication as a space for democratic reasoning rather than a marketplace of polarisation.

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